Organization of Practicum Experience 3.1

The field practicum is an integral part of both the foundation and concentration curriculum of the MSW program. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) refers to field education as the “signature pedagogy” in social work education (Educational Policy 2.3). The practicum provides students the opportunity to draw upon the theories and practice skills they learn in the classroom and apply them to the practice setting. Students are offered social work experiences at increasing levels of complexity as they move through the practicum course sequence. By demonstrating specific practice behaviors, students are challenged to master the 10 core competencies outlined by the CSWE.

Some general field placement goals include:

- integrating social work theory and practice
- deepening understanding of social work principles, concepts, and values
- refinement of social work practice skills
- increasing self-awareness
- learning to use supervision and feedback constructively
- developing an understanding of agency functioning and organizational dynamics
- beginning the professional socialization process by observing and interacting with social work professionals
- learning to perform a social work role in a human service agency
- expanding understanding of how social policy applies to specific practice situations and target populations
- increasing knowledge of the social service delivery system
- refining oral and written communication skills
- providing opportunities to work with diverse populations
- acquainting students with research and evaluation methodology
- identifying areas of interest and areas for professional development

The foundation practicum (SW 5800 Graduate Field Practicum 1) is designed to provide students with a generalist social work practice experience. This is a 300 clock hour practicum, which requires two and one half days per week of work during one semester. Typically, full-time students will take this course in the winter semester of the first year and part-time students will take this course in the winter term of their second year. In exceptional situations part-time students, with the approval of their advisor, may be granted the option of completing the foundation field experience over two semesters, beginning in the winter semester, and extending into the following summer. (Students who wish to pursue this option should meet with their academic advisor to make the appropriate arrangements. Students must work a minimum of 12
hour per week at the practicum site). Students receive four graduate credits for successful completion of the foundation field practicum. Students choose their foundation practicum from among agencies that have agreed to provide this generalist experience to MSW students. **Students must have completed, or be concurrently enrolled in, all foundation courses (with the exception of SW5450) and have a GPA of 3.0 or better to register for the foundation field experience. Students on academic probation or on restricted status will not be permitted to begin Graduate Field Practicum I.**

In addition to taking the foundation field practicum, students take a 2-credit practicum seminar course (SW 5801 Graduate Field Practicum Seminar) designed to examine the ethical and practice issues of the student placement. This course is taken concurrently with the foundation practicum. This course meets bi-weekly for two hours. A syllabus for the course is available on our webpage under the Field Education/MSW tab.

The advanced concentration field practica (SW 6800: Graduate Field Practicum II and SW 6850: Graduate Field Practicum III) are selected by students to complement their career objectives. **Before entering advanced field practica students must have: a) completed all foundation courses and; b) completed or be concurrently enrolled in, at least one advanced practice course (SW6300, SW6311-12-13, SW6120, SW6250, SW6150 or SW6160 - it is recommended that students take 6300 prior to 6311-12-13); c) a GPA of 3.0 or better. Students on academic probation or on restricted status will not be permitted to begin Graduate Field Practicum II or III.** Students choose their concentration practica from among agencies that have agreed to provide these specialized experiences to MSW students. These practica reflect the student’s choice of one of three possible concentrations:

1) Family Practice  
2) Social Work Leadership & Management  
3) Gerontology.

Students work at the practicum site three full days per week for two semesters. Full-time students will typically complete their advanced field practica in the fall and winter terms of their second year, part-time students will typically complete these practica in the fourth year of their studies. By working three days per week in an agency for two semesters, students will have accrued 600 clock hours in practicum. (In situations where working three days per week at the practicum site is not feasible, students may extend the practicum experience into the following semester. Students should meet with their academic advisor to arrange this. **The entire concentration field experience must be completed in one year**). Typically, students complete both advanced practica at the same agency. They are given 6 graduate hours for completing the two semesters of practicum: 3 hours per semester.

**Block placements** (completing both practica in one semester) **are allowed only in exceptional situations.** Students considering block placements should first speak with their advisor about their intentions. With the advisor's verbal permission, the student should make his/her request in writing to the Office of Field Education. The student should outline the reasons for requesting the placement option. Permission to take a block field placement will only be granted in situations where it is determined by both the student’s advisor and the Director of Field Education that such an arrangement is in the student's educational best interest.
Students are expected to select a site for the concentration practicum that differs from the foundation practicum. This is to ensure that students have exposure to a variety of learning experiences. Students may request an exception to this policy by submitting a proposal in writing to their advisor describing their rationale for remaining at the same site and explaining how the concentration experience will differ from the foundation experience. Students’ requests to remain at the same site will be reviewed by the advisor, as well as by the Office of Field Education, and approval will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. This proposal must be submitted the semester prior to enrollment in the concentration practica (SW6800 & SW6850).

Students complete a total of 900 hours in practicum, 300 in foundation and 600 in advanced practicum.

Students and departmental faculty use the practice-theory, policy and specialized research courses within their concentrations to discuss and review practicum issues to ensure integration of classroom content during the advanced practicum experience. For example, the practice-theory course of each concentration draws on examples from student practica to illustrate the concepts and skills taught in the course. Similarly, the policy courses use current issues that surface within the agencies to highlight the development, implementation and consequences of policies that affect clients. In the concentration-year research course, each student is expected to develop and implement a research study within her/his practicum setting. This experience integrates the content from the first-year research courses into the reality of agency-based research and program evaluation.

All graduate students in practicum must have an MSW supervisor with two years of post-master’s experience. Students must have passing grades in the field placement and must be ranked as “accomplished” on each of the 10 core competencies outlined by the Council on Social Work Education during their final semester in practicum in order to graduate from the program. Students who lack either the intellectual or emotional aptitude for professional practice, or who violate the code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers in field practica, will be reviewed for possible dismissal from the program.

ACADEMIC CREDIT FOR LIFE EXPERIENCE AND PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE WILL NOT BE GRANTED IN WHOLE OR IN PART IN LIEU OF THE FIELD PRACTICUM COURSES.

Practicum Planning Process 3.2

Practicum placement at UM-St. Louis is a structured, self-selection process. Before students contact social service agencies to inquire about field placements, they must participate in a planning process designed to help clarify their goals and interests, and to assess their readiness to begin practicum. Each student completes an application for the practicum and meets with the assigned faculty advisor to ensure that all academic requirements have been completed and to discuss practicum site possibilities. Students are also required to attend mandatory practicum planning meetings that are held during the semester prior to the first practicum. These meetings assist the student with selection of the practicum site and development of the learning agreement.
Students are also encouraged to attend annual practicum/career fairs to learn about potential placements sites.

**FORMS**

**All practicum-related forms may be downloaded from the Field Education Tab at [http://www.umsl.edu/~socialwk/](http://www.umsl.edu/~socialwk/)**

**Students may access the searchable database of approved agencies at [https://apps.umsl.edu/webapps/TTS/socwork/field/students/login.cfm](https://apps.umsl.edu/webapps/TTS/socwork/field/students/login.cfm)**

**Agencies and Field Instructors may access the online application to become approved at [https://apps.umsl.edu/webapps/TTS/socwork/field/fieldforms/login.cfm](https://apps.umsl.edu/webapps/TTS/socwork/field/fieldforms/login.cfm)**

The step by step process for practicum planning is as follows:

1. **Attend first practicum planning meeting**
   a) Overview of the practicum process (including review of the practicum manual, forms and policies)
   b) Selecting a practicum site
   c) Professional Interviewing
   d) Completing the learning agreement (concentration students only)

2. **Student completes practicum application, reviews it with his/her advisor, and submits it to the Office of Field Education.**

3. **Field faculty review applications and approve requests to interview at practicum sites.**

4. **Student contacts approved agencies, interviews and secures practicum.** (At the initial meeting, both the student and the agency explore the possibility/desirability of participation in the practicum at the agency. Either the student or agency can decide against the placement).

5. **Second practicum planning meeting to learn how to complete the learning agreement (foundation students only).**

6. **Student, in consultation with agency field instructor, drafts a learning agreement.**

7. **Learning agreement is reviewed by the Director of Field Education (foundation students), or the faculty advisor (concentration students), and necessary suggestions for revisions are made.** Once revisions are complete the assignment is signed by the student, the agency supervisor and the faculty advisor (concentration students only), and is approved by the Office of Field Education.

8. **Copies of the learning agreement are distributed to the student, faculty liaison, and field instructor.** The original remains on file with the Office of Field Education.
9. A faculty site visit to the agency is conducted when the student completes approximately 150 hours of the field placement. The student, agency field instructor and university faculty liaison participate in the visit.

10. The agency field instructor completes and submits a mid-term evaluation after the student completes approximately 150 hours of placement. This evaluation should be reviewed with and signed by the student.

11. After completion of 300 hours of placement, the agency field instructor completes a final evaluation, reviews it with the student and submits it to the Office of Field Education. Both the student and the field instructor must sign this evaluation.

12. The student submits time sheets signed by the field instructor and completes the Student Evaluation of the Field Experience form and submits it to the Office of Field Education.

13. A grade of Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U) is assigned by the Office of Field Education.

1. Students must submit final signed copies of the learning agreement by the due date. Failure to adhere to the deadline will result in the loss of hours accrued up to that point.

2. If evaluation forms and time sheets are not received by the Office of Field Education by the due date, the student may receive a delayed grade for the practicum course.

**Practicum Site Selection Criteria 3.3**

The Director and Assistant Director of Field Education are responsible for negotiating practicum-site agreements with agencies that meet the following criteria:

- A clearly articulated agency mission and purpose that is compatible with the philosophy and purpose of social work.

- Agency functioning that is consistent with the [NASW Code of Ethics](#).

- Identification of agency staff who meet the requirements for practicum supervision of MSW students and who are willing to serve in this capacity.

- Provision of learning opportunities that meet the educational competencies of the BSW, MSW foundation and/or MSW concentration curriculum.

- Provision of staff time for planning student learning experiences, instruction, and evaluation of students.

- Facilitate research activities by students designed to evaluate professional practice.
• Administrative stability and staffing that assure continuity of instruction for students.

• Physical facilities that permit students adequate space for activities related to practicum objectives.

**Students may access the searchable database of approved agencies from:**
https://apps.umsl.edu/webapps/ITS/socwork/field/students/login.cfm

**Information and instructions for new field instructors and agency contacts is available at:**
http://www.umsl.edu/~socialwk/Field%20Education/FI-Collaborative-information.html

**Agency representatives may access the online application to become an approved site at:**
https://apps.umsl.edu/webapps/ITS/socwork/field/fieldforms/login.cfm

Practicum Instructor Qualifications 3.4

The qualifications for the instructors supervising students in the MSW Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis include:

• Possession of the MSW degree.

• Post-Master’s social work practice for a minimum of two years.

• Demonstrated competency in the field of practice being used for the practicum.

• Desire/interest in mentoring/supervising MSW students in their foundation or concentration practica, and a willingness to make reasonable adjustments to his/her schedule to meet the learning needs of students.

• Previous practicum instruction or supervisory experience is preferred.

**Information and instructions for new field instructors and agency contacts is available at:**
http://www.umsl.edu/~socialwk/Field%20Education/FI-Collaborative-information.html

**Agency representatives may access the online application to become an approved site at:**
https://apps.umsl.edu/webapps/ITS/socwork/field/fieldforms/login.cfm

Evaluation of Students in Practicum 3.5

The Learning Agreement is the chief mechanism by which the students, their supervisors and faculty of the School of Social Work evaluate the performance of students in their field
placement. This form is used by students, their practicum instructors, and department faculty to review students’ strengths and continuing learning needs.

Students and practicum instructors are asked to evaluate each student’s performance in writing at mid-term and again at the end of the semester by completing mid-term and final practicum evaluation forms. Information is also shared with the faculty liaison from the department at an agency-based meeting each semester. The student grade, assigned by the student’s faculty liaison, is based on the agency field instructor’s written mid-term and final evaluation of the student, and the on-site conference between the agency supervisor and the faculty liaison. A grade of S (Satisfactory) or U (Unsatisfactory) will be given. According to Graduate school regulations, grades lower than C are recorded as a U. (For a further explanation of graduate school, see the UM-St. Louis Bulletin at www.umsl.edu).

Note: Students must have passing grades in the field placement and must be ranked as “accomplished” on each of the 10 core competencies outlined by the Council on Social Work Education during their final semester in practicum in order to graduate from the program.

Learning Agreements, Midterm and Final evaluation forms may be downloaded from the Field Education Tab on the School of Social Work webpage.

For more information please refer to the Grade Appeal Procedure link on the UMSL Division for Student Affairs, Student Planner web page.

Notice of Non Discrimination 3.6

It is the policy of the University of Missouri to provide equal opportunity for all enrolled students and applicants for admission to the University on the basis of merit without discrimination on the basis of their race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability, or Vietnam era veteran status. Sexual harassment shall be considered discrimination because of sex.

To insure compliance with this policy all University of Missouri prospective or enrolled students shall have available to them this student discrimination grievance procedure for resolving complaints and/or grievances regarding alleged discrimination.

This grievance procedure neither supersedes nor takes precedence over established University procedures of due process for any and all matters relayed to Academic dishonesty, Grade Appeals, Traffic appeals, disciplinary Appeals, or other specific campus procedures which are authorized by the board of Curators and deal with faculty/staff responsibilities.

Note: A grievance concerning specific incidents filed under this discrimination grievance procedure shall not be processed on behalf of any student who elects to utilize another University grievance procedure. In addition, the filing of a grievance under these procedures precludes the subsequent use of other University grievance or appeals procedures for the same incident.

For more information please refer to the Discrimination Grievance Procedure for Students link on the UMSL Division of Student Affairs, Student Planner web page.
Students with Disabilities 3.7

Students requiring an accommodation related to a disability should meet with their agency practicum instructor during the first week of the semester to ensure that they are appropriately accommodated. UM-St. Louis Office of Disability Access Services (314) 516-5211 may be contacted for information about general University policy and additional supports. If there are problems in negotiating arrangements with the practicum agency, please contact the Assistant Director or the Director of Field Education for guidance in resolving this issue.

For more information please refer to the Students with Disabilities link on the UMSL Division of Student Affairs, Student Planner web page.

Professional Liability 3.8

The Curators of the University of Missouri maintain a self-insured professional liability policy for its various professional fields. This program covers duly registered social work students for events that may occur while performing duties in their field practicum. The policy provides in minimum amounts not less than $1,000,000 per occurrence on an occurrence basis, $3,000,000 annual aggregate. Students wishing to obtain additional coverage at their own expense may contact the National Association of Social Workers Insurance Trust at (800) 638-8799, ext 387.

The University does not provide automobile liability coverage. Students who will be using their personal vehicle for agency business should negotiate automobile coverage with the agency at the time of the interview.

Safety and Security of Students in Field 3.9

Safety of students in field is a priority for the Office of Field Education. While it is impossible to remove all potential risk from social work practice, it is possible and desirable for students to exercise caution and take preventative measures to assure their safety while delivering services to clients. This topic is addressed in more detail at the MSW Student Orientation and in the foundation field practicum seminar course. Students are also encouraged to take advantage of university or agency sponsored workshops focused on personal safety, including SW4642, Non-violent Crisis Intervention. Students have the right, and are encouraged to raise issues of potential risk and safety with agency field supervisors during placement interviews and at any time thereafter.

Paid Practica 3.10

The Office of Field Education encourages agencies and organizations to offer paid practicum experiences to our social work students. In such cases, the student is paid a stipend for time served at the practicum. This is arranged between the student and the agency. The agency and practicum supervisor must be approved by the Office of Field Education as outlined in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 of this manual.
Policy for Practicum Placement in Agency in Which Student Works as an Employee 3.11

Students who wish to explore the possibility of using their place of paid employment as a field practicum assignment must submit their written request to their advisor using the form “Application to Use Agency of Current Employment as Practicum Site.” The form can be downloaded from the Field Education/MSW Forms section of our webpage. This form must be completed the semester prior to the placement. Individual requests will be carefully reviewed using these five standards:

1. The agency must be approved as a field placement site based on the criteria established by the School of Social Work at UM-St. Louis. If the agency has not been previously utilized as a field placement, it will be reviewed as would any other potential setting.

2. The student must list all the positions he/she has held in the agency, including a description of employment responsibilities, schedule of work hours, and name of supervisor(s).

3. The student must be assigned --as their practicum—to a social work department, unit or program that differs from all prior or current employment units. This is to ensure that the student has exposure to new methods, client populations, and other new experiences for learning.

4. The agency must agree to provide an MSW field instructor who has not supervised the student in employment responsibilities. As in other settings, the designated supervisor must meet the criteria for approval as a Field Practicum Instructor as outlined in Section 3.4 of this manual. The proposed field instructor is required to submit an online application to become approved, and must agree to participate in the collaborative field instructor certification program. Click here for more information.

5. The schedule of hours that are designated for the field assignment must be clearly delineated from the employment schedule.

Students are strongly encouraged to complete at least one of their field placement experiences at a site other than their place of employment.

Abuse/Neglect Background Check / Criminal Background Check / Criminal Records History / Health Information 3.12

Students should inform the Director of Field Education of any information regarding previous felony convictions and/or other information that may impact the student’s ability to secure a practicum. The student will be asked to sign a release of information authorizing the UM-St. Louis School of Social Work to discuss this information with approved practicum sites.
Many field education placement sites will require students to obtain a child abuse and neglect background check and/or a criminal records background check. Health care settings may also require students to provide verification of immunizations or other medical information and/or require a physical examination. The School of Social Work does not conduct child abuse and neglect or criminal background checks, and it does not secure or maintain medical information on its students. It is the responsibility of the student to work in conjunction with the placement agency to obtain the required checks. Students may be asked by the agency to cover the cost of these checks.

In the event that the agency is unable to assist the student with securing the required checks the Director of Field Education will refer the student to an independent company (Certified Background.Com) that will assist the student with obtaining the required checks. The student will be responsible for any costs associated with the checks.

**Sharing Sensitive Information 3.13**

The Office of Field Education will share all relevant information with appropriate persons including the faculty liaison, the agency field instructor, the student’s advisor, the Director of the MSW Program and the Director of the School of Social Work. Relevant information is defined as information that may have an impact on the practicum site selection, placement or implementation process and that may impact clients, agency field instructors, staff or the learning experience. Such information will be shared to enable informed choice by field instructors, protect clients, protect students and facilitate the learning process. Agency field instructors are also expected to share relevant information with the Office of Field Education.

**Withdrawing from Practicum 3.14**

The practicum is distinct from most other social work courses in that a field placement in the community entails not only the educational objectives of the student and faculty, but also professional responsibilities to clients, social service agencies, and the community. When students engage clients and assume service responsibilities, they have ongoing professional, educational and ethical responsibilities to consider. Considerable effort is spent on the part of the faculty and field instructor planning and orienting the student to the placement. For this reason students should only consider withdrawing prematurely from a field placement site under extenuating circumstances.

Should a student desire or be requested to terminate a placement prior to the completion of the total hours required, the student’s field faculty liaison should be contacted immediately to discuss the situation. Such a situation may occur as a result of: insufficient resources and/or experiences to provide for an adequate learning experience; agency restructuring; a personality or ideological conflict between the student and field instructor and/or agency; personal crises; a serious illness; or other educational considerations.

Only after consultation with the faculty liaison and the agency field instructor may the student terminate the practicum. The faculty liaison, in consultation with the Director of Field Education and the student, will determine whether or not the student will be permitted to resume a
practicum at a new site, and whether or not credit will be awarded to the student for hours completed at the first practicum site.

**Termination from the field practicum/and or MSW program for non-academic reasons 3.15**

A student enrolling in the School of Social Work at the University of Missouri-St. Louis assumes an obligation to behave in a manner that is compatible with the University and School educational enterprises. This applies not only to the student’s behavior on campus, but to the field practicum as well. The Collected Rules and Regulations for the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Section 200.010, Code of Student Conduct ([www.umsl.edu/bulletin](http://www.umsl.edu/bulletin)) and the School of Social Work BSW and MSW student handbooks clearly delineate conduct for which a student can be sanctioned or disciplined. In addition, sanctions (including but not limited to termination from the field placement) may be imposed on any student in the School of Social Work who has been found to have violated the professional expectations and standards described in the National Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics.

Special efforts are made in the School’s two academic programs to identify problematic student performance as early as possible. In most instances, the review of a student’s academic and/or professional performance begins in the classroom. If the instructor has concerns, these are shared with the student and the student’s advisor. If the problem cannot be resolved at that level, the BSW/MSW program director will become involved and finally, the School’s Personnel and Policy Committee (PPC) may be asked to review a student’s academic and/or professional performance. The Director of the School of Social Work and at least two other tenured faculty members constitute the permanent membership of the PPC. In those instances where the student’s performance review is in regards to performance in the field practicum, the Assistant Director or Director of Field Education, and if appropriate, the field instructor will be invited to meet with the PPC. In this context, the field representatives may be asked to participate in the decision-making process.

When there are questions about a student’s ability to perform professionally as a BSW/MSW social worker in the practicum, the student will be notified and asked to meet with the Assistant Director or Director of Field Education, and when appropriate, the faculty advisor, and/or the Director of the BSW/MSW program. If the problem is not resolved, the student may also be asked to meet with the PPC. In most cases, a plan to remedy the problem will be developed and shared with the student, who will be allowed to respond to the plan. An exception would be an egregious violation of professional behavior as defined by the National Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics. The remediation plan generally will include a requirement that the student seek help for those problems that affect the student’s ability to engage in professional social work behavior. If appropriate, the student may be asked to repeat practicum hours that were not successfully completed. Students who are terminated from their practicum experience will be required to drop the corresponding seminar course and will not be allowed to count any practicum hours that have been accrued. The earliest the student may return to practicum and seminar is the following semester and after successful completion of the remediation plan. If, after review by the PPC, the student has been unwilling or unable to complete the agreed upon plan, the student may be dismissed from the program.
Should the retention procedures fail to produce a decision satisfactory to the student involved, the student may appeal to the university’s grade appeal procedure described in the BSW/MSW student handbook and the campus Bulletin.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE
Please see guidelines for the use of social media in social work practice on the BSW/MSW Field Education website.

**Reporting Suspected Incidents or Abuse or Neglect 3.16**

Students in field placement have an ethical responsibility and legal obligation to report suspected abuse or neglect to elders or children. Students should report incidents of suspected abuse or neglect to their supervisors immediately. Students should seek further direction from their supervisors about agency procedures for reporting such incidents to the child abuse or elder abuse hot lines.